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Charlotte M. Karam & Fida Afiouni

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## Localizing women's experiences in academia: multilevel factors at play in the Arab Middle East and North Africa

Charlotte M. Karam\* and Fida Afioni

*Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon*

This article explores the localized experiences of women at work in higher education in the under-researched context of the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Our main research questions are: *What is the current status of academic women between and across the countries of this region? How can human resources play a developmental role for women at work in academic institutions, as well as for the region in general?* We adopt a two-part research method in this study. First, through a critical review of the literature, we develop a regionally relevant macrolevel hypothetical model to localize a gender perspective on women at work. Second, we engage in a focused empirical examination of publicly available university data to document the: (1) representation of women across ranks; and (2) specific content of pertinent human resource policies. On the basis of these data, we propose a more complete multilevel hypothetical model upon which we put forward a critical discussion and directions for future research on gender, human resource management and regional development more broadly.

**Keywords:** academia; Arab Middle East and North Africa; development; gender; human resources; Islamic family-friendly policies; universities

### Introduction

The current status of academic women has been a topic of interest for researchers for over four decades. Early studies documenting the experiences of these women were undertaken by Lewin and Duchan (1971), Widom and Burke (1978) and Brown and Smith (1989). Since then, many authors have explored the status of women in academia, namely, in the UK and other western countries (Bailyn 2003; Benschop and Brouns 2003; Probert 2005; Moss and Pryke 2007; Knights and Kerfoot 2008; Roos and Gatta 2009; Byers and Crocker 2012). Although no recent comprehensive review could be found, a number of books on this subject in the last decade are available (DiGeorgio-Lutz 2002; Li and Beckett 2006; Stewart, Malley and LaVaque-Manty 2007; Berger and Guidroz 2010). These efforts have centered mainly within the western academic context. While the frustrations, challenges and success of women in many western universities (e.g. USA, Canada, UK) are being charted on an ongoing basis, similar data about the current status of academic women in the developing world are less available in published academic literature. There are some exceptions in the last 15 years including studies focused on the nations of the commonwealth and sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Naidoo 1998; Musisi 2003; Cloete, Pillay, Badat and Moja 2004; Moultrie and de la Rey 2004; Kwesiga and Ssendiwala 2006; Morley et al. 2006; Morley 2007), but little is known about the status of academic women in other parts of the developing world.

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [ck16@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ck16@aub.edu.lb)

Our study attempts to address this gap by examining the issues surrounding gender and women working in higher education institutions in 17 countries within the Arab Middle East and North Africa (Arab MENA). We specifically examine Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestinian Territories (Gaza Strip and West Bank) and Yemen. Our first research question is: *What is the current status of academic women between and across the countries of the Arab MENA?* In line with Hutchings, Metcalfe and Cooper (2010) and others (e.g. Morishima 1995; Budhwar and Mellahi 2006; Marmenout 2009), we approach these countries as heterogeneous and attempt to explore macrolevel and organizational-level patterns of similarity and difference related to these academic women.

Examination of the broader macrolevel context is important for a greater understanding of human resource (HR) management. Any holistic understanding of trends existing across HR systems in regional universities can be better approached through an examination of the broader sociocultural, political and economic patterns. Efforts to expand and enrich the discussion of macrolevel forces are of paramount importance to develop a more comprehensive framework for regional analysis. Beyond broad consideration of the macrolevel within which HR is taking place, the gender elements of context – internal and external labor market segregation, gender hierarchies, government quota regulations, sociocognitive patterns, normative behavioral trends, intergovernmental dialogues – need more attention (Kessler and Purcell 1992). Furthermore, cross-level considerations of how macrolevel factors trickle down to the organizational level to shape HR policies and practices are equally important. Research, therefore, is needed that examines not only macrolevel influences but also the role that might be played by embedded HR policies and practices in either exacerbating or narrowing the disadvantages facing women in the workplace in these international work contexts (Truss 1999; Metcalfe 2011a, b). Therefore, our second research question is: *How can HRs play a developmental role for women at work in academic institutions, as well as for the region in general?*

A better understanding of the potential role of HR must be based on a greater understanding of the mismatch between the macrolevel realities and the needs of female employees, on the one hand, and the organizational HR initiatives and policies, on the other. A multilevel perspective will allow HR practitioners to take more informed decisions concerning the development of the HR function in the Arab MENA to match the changing landscape of gender relations. We suggest that pertinent beginning points for this endeavor are to consider: (a) the knowledge that exists about the top-down cross-level impact of macrolevel contextual factors on HR policies and practices relevant to women at work in the Arab MENA; and (b) the evidence that exists for the formulation and implementation of indigenous HR policies and initiatives targeting women and gender equity in regional universities and colleges.

Taken together, examination of the cross-level influence of macrolevel factors on organizational policy and action delineates the general scope of the current study whereby we adopt a methodology explicitly targeted at documenting relevant information at both levels of analysis. In line with this, our paper is divided into two separate parts. First, we develop a framework for exploration and sensemaking at the macrolevel of analysis based on a critical review of the relevant literature. In the second part of our paper, we embark on an empirical examination of publicly available HR-related data from and about regional universities and we use these to inform the second level of our hypothetical model (i.e. organizational factors). In the general discussion, we critically reflect on these findings and, in particular, on how the macrolevel environment shapes the interplay between

gender and HR policies and practices in institutions of higher education within the Arab MENA. Overall, our aim is to contribute to the broader dialogue of development by highlighting what Morley (2007) calls the ‘intertextuality between gender, higher education, and development’ (p. 607), and by critically reflecting on how HR can play a role in facilitating this agenda. Such a focus on women, HR and gender equity has been noted to be of paramount importance for social and economic development overall (see Klasen 2002; Morley et al. 2006; Morley 2007).

### **Part I: critical literature review on Arab MENA macrolevel context**

Macrolevel factors, which make up the context within which women live and work, shape organizational policies and practices, and therefore, the employment opportunities available to women in any sector, including academia. There has been a growing interest in contextualizing organizational research by considering macrolevel influences more specifically (Mowday and Sutton 1993; Schuler and Rogovsky 1998; Rousseau and Fried 2001; Tsui 2004; Osland and Osland 2005; Johns 2006; Dewettinck and Remue 2010). In the current section, we focus on broadening our understanding of the variant contextual factors potentially shaping the day-to-day opportunities and barriers faced by these women. To do this, we critically review literature with the aim of exploring *the macrolevel contextual factors shaping women’s experiences in academia (or at work) in the Arab MENA?*

#### **Methodology**

Our search focused on identifying region-wide reports and peer-reviewed academic journal articles published after 2000 and listed in the following databases: SCOPUS, EMERALD, ELSEVIER and PSYCHLIT (*first round keywords*: women, female, gender, academia, academy, university, college and career; *second round keywords*: women, female, gender, work, management, employment and career). In total, 20 reports and 63 relevant articles were retrieved and served as the basis for our content analysis. To identify our key themes, which will be used as a basis for our hypothetical model, each article was read by two analyzers independently. During this process, the *emergent coding approach* to content analysis guided the analysis (Stemler 2001). Once the readers read 25% of the articles, they discussed their respective themes and agreed on a consolidated list. This list of macrolevel factors served as a template that the analyzers then used to code the rest of the articles. Any new themes were added to the template and discussed at intermittent meeting points.

#### **Results I: brief review of regional reports**

The review of the reports suggests that the 17 countries vary substantially in terms of demographic, socioeconomic and development indices (see Table 1). For example, according to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2011) and the World Bank (2012), the population of the entire Arab MENA is 360.7 million with individual countries ranging from 0.78 to 81.53 million (Bahrain and Egypt, respectively). The average life expectancy of this region is 70.4 years, ranging from 65 years in Yemen to 78 years in Qatar (World Bank 2012). This variation is also captured when one compares the living standards. The growth in gross domestic product (GDP growth – annual percent – in US dollars) ranges from 10.5% (Yemen) and – 1.8% (Tunisia) to 18.8% (Qatar). Similarly, the overall GDP in the region varies between US\$ 22.9 million (Bahrain) and US\$ 576.8

Table 1. Selected economic and development indicators from regional reports.

Country	Population 2010 <sup>a</sup> (in millions)	Life expectancy 2010 <sup>a</sup>	HDI rank 2011 <sup>a</sup>	HDI value 2011 <sup>a</sup>	GDP growth (annual %) 2007–2011 <sup>a</sup>	GDP 2011 (in millions US dollars) <sup>a</sup>
Algeria	35.47	73	96	0.698	2.5	188.7
Bahrain	1.26	75	42	0.806	4.5 (2010; not available for 2011)	22.9
Egypt	81.12	73	113	0.644	1.8	229.5
Iraq	32.03	68	132	0.573	9.9	115.4
Jordan	6.05	73	95	0.698	2.6	28.8
Kuwait	2.74	75	63	0.760	8.2	175.6
Lebanon	4.23	72	71	0.739	3.0	42.2
Libya	6.35	75	64	0.760	2.1 (2009)	62.4 (2009)
Morocco	31.95	72	130	0.582	4.5	100.2
Oman	2.78	73	89	0.705	4.5	71.8
Palestine	Not listed	73	114	0.641	Not available	Not available
Qatar	1.76	78	37	0.831	18.8	173
Saudi Arabia	27.45	74	56	0.770	6.8	576.8
Syria	20.45	76	119	0.632	3.2 (2010)	59.1
Tunisia	10.55	75	94	0.698	-1.8	45.9
UAE	7.51	76.5	30	0.846	4.9	360.2
Yemen	24.05	65.5	154	0.462	-10.5	33.7

<sup>a</sup> World Bank (2012).

million (Saudi Arabia). Furthermore, people-centered measures of development suggest that the rankings for the nations of the region span most preset categories. For example, according to the 2011 UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), Arab countries falling in the top range (i.e. *very high* or *high development*) include Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE as well as Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Tunisia and Lebanon. Many of the remaining countries can be categorized as *developing nations*, including Jordan, Syria, Palestinian Territories, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco.

Macrolevel data more directly related to gender also suggest major between-nation variations. At the most basic level, fertility and annual population growth statistics from the region range widely from 0.7% in Lebanon to 6.1% in Qatar with the average total fertility rate (births per woman) ranging from 1.8 in Lebanon to 4.7 in Iraq (World Bank 2012). Other gender-related indices from the region are also telling. For example, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) published in the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report, suggests that the largest global losses in terms of gender equity are found in the Arab states. GII values range from 0 (equality) to 1 (total inequality) and are designed to capture the loss in achievements due to gender disparities in the dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment and labor force participation (UNDP 2010). The lowest rankings in the region include Yemen ranking 146th, Saudi Arabia 135th and Iraq 117th (out of 187).

Furthermore, the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) is also an interesting index to consider more closely for the region, as there appears to be an interesting anomaly. This index helps to measure gaps in gender equality pertaining to economic, political, educational and health-based criteria independently from the country's level of development. A good score on the GGGI suggests that there is a small gap between male and female levels of health, political empowerment, educational attainment and economic participation. Global averages on the GGGI suggest that gaps pertaining to economic and political participation are wide (between 0.59 and 0.19), and those pertaining to health and education are lower on an average (between 0.96 and 0.93). This general pattern seems exacerbated in the Arab MENA. Indeed, the region holds the largest gaps between men and women in the world, with an average regional score of 0.58. This score means that the MENA region has closed 58% of its gender gap and therefore 42% of the gap remains.

The largest disparity clearly exists in economic participation and opportunity as well as in political empowerment. The achievements in *educational attainment* and *health and survival* subindices, however, show a different direction where scores are promising particularly for the most developed Arab countries. For example, in UAE, Qatar, Algeria and Tunisia, tertiary graduation rates of women have reached above 60% of total graduating students. Despite this progress, these countries fare badly in terms of involving women in the economic and political life (see Table 2). In Qatar, the gender gap in education ranks 57/135, but the gender gap in political empowerment ranks in the bottom five globally (132/135). It is interesting to note that Yemen is the only country to have a GGGI score below 0.5, which means that less than 50% of its gender gap is closed notoriously placing it in the last on the global ranking list (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2011). These scores should be compared against North American, European and Central Asian scores, which have closed over 70% of their gender gap (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2010). Overall therefore, it appears that where the region scores good ranks in closing educational and health subindices, the ranking on the economic and political subindices are lower.

Table 2. Selected gender-related indices for the Arab MENA region.

Country	Annual population growth 2011 (%) <sup>a</sup>	Fertility rate 2010 (births/woman) <sup>a</sup>	Tertiary education <sup>b</sup> (% women graduates in 2009)	Female labor force participation rate <sup>c</sup> (%)	GII <sup>c</sup> score (rank/187)	GGGI-index 1 Gender gap in educational attainment Score <sup>d</sup> (rank/135)	GGGI-index 2 Gender gap in political empowerment Score <sup>d</sup> (rank/135)	WEOI (2012) <sup>e</sup>
Algeria	1.4	2.3	63	37.20	0.412 (71)	0.9502 (96)	0.0350 (124)	39.7 (104)
Bahrain	4.8	2.5	N/A	32.40	0.288 (44)	0.9862 (81)	0.0376 (122)	49.0 (78)
Egypt	1.7	2.7	53	22.40	N/A	0.9081 (110)	0.0311 (126)	48.7 (80)
Iraq	2.9	4.7	N/A	13.80	0.579 (117)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Jordan	2.2	3.8	55	23.30	0.456 (83)	0.9869 (79)	0.0558 (113)	45.9 (93)
Kuwait	2.9	2.3	N/A	45.40	0.229 (37)	0.9834 (84)	0.0435 (116)	49.9 (76)
Lebanon	0.7	1.8	57	22.30	0.440 (76)	0.9773 (90)	0.0282 (128)	48.7 (79)
Libya	1.1	2.6	N/A	24.70	0.314 (51)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Morocco	1	2.3	46	26.20	0.510 (104)	0.8653 (115)	0.0672 (102)	47.0 (20)
Oman	2.3	2.3	59	25.40	0.309 (49)	0.9412 (99)	0.0256 (129)	48.2 (37)
Palestine	2.9	4.5	59	16.50	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Qatar	6.1	2.3	62	49.90	0.549 (111)	0.9924 (57)	0.0000 (132)	N/A
Saudi Arabia	2.3	2.8	57	21.20	0.646 (135)	0.9646 (92)	0.0000 (132)	39.7 (38)
Syria	1.8	2.8	N/A	21.10	0.474 (86)	0.9135 (109)	0.0603 (110)	35.9 (31)
Tunisia	1.0 (2010)	2.0	63	25.60	0.293 (45)	0.9662 (94)	0.1278 (69)	59.5 (49)
UAE	4.9	1.7	60	41.90	0.234 (38)	0.9914 (59)	0.1394 (62)	50.8 (72)
Yemen	3.1	3.0	33	19.90	0.769(146)	0.6420(134)	0.0164(131)	24.6 (126)

Note: WEOI, Women's Economic Opportunity Index; GII, Gender Inequality Index; GGGI, Global Gender Gap Index.

<sup>a</sup> World Bank (2012).

<sup>b</sup> UNDP (2009).

<sup>c</sup> UNDP (2011).

<sup>d</sup> Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi (2011).

<sup>e</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (2012)

Delving deeper into these latter areas of gender assessment, the Freedom House indicator takes a closer look at the level of women's rights in a particular nation (Federica 2009). With regards to the Arab MENA, this indicator suggests that there is a complex set of obstacles that prevent women from enjoying the full range of political, civil, legal and economic rights (Kelly and Breslin 2010). The embedded legal and legislative frameworks in each nation reveal a number of restrictive patterns concerning women. For example, although the constitutions of most countries in this region guarantee equality of all citizens before the law (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is an exception), women still face legal forms of discrimination that are systematic and that pervade every aspect of life (Kelly and Breslin 2010, p. 11).

Many of the reports suggest that there are generalized patriarchal biases (embedded within cultural, religious and legislative traditions) that restrict the opportunities for women. For example, Kelly (2009) in the Freedom House report suggests that Arab women continue to face systematic discrimination deriving from deeply entrenched societal norms combined with conservative interpretations of Islamic law. The Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2009) also clearly suggests that, to varying degrees, Arab nations are still bound by entrenched social pressures characterized by patriarchal kinship patterns, social subordination and ingrained male dominance. That being said, there also appears to be some progress in terms of women's rights over the last decade. For example, in the UAE, the first women judges were appointed and women were given access to serve as federal prosecutors, cabinet members and as ministers (Kirdar 2009). Compiling comparative statistics from the Dubai Women Establishment (2009) suggests that the countries that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council show particularly good progress over the last 10 years (see Table 3).

Moghadam (2004) explains this low participation rate as being grounded within restrictive constitutional rights and labor laws:

that ensure rights for men and women workers are contradicted and contravened by family laws that place a woman under the guardianship of a male and require her to obtain the permission of father, husband, or other male guardian to marry, seek employment, start a business, or travel. (p. 42)

Indeed, some of the most visible constraints facing women in the region concern their legal rights in terms of marriage, maternity and working conditions. Table 4 summarizes information regarding many of these legal rights. The legal age of marriage for females, for example, ranges from 9 (with guardian consent, Palestinian Territories) to 18 (Iraq and Lebanon; UN 2007). With the exception of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, women do not have equal rights when it comes to decisions about divorce in the majority of these countries (UNDP 2009), as shown in Table 4.

In 1973, the United Nations General Assembly established the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW). This convention came into force in 1981 focused on defining what constitutes discrimination against women as well as to establish an agenda for national action to end such discrimination (UNDP 2010). Table 4 lists the specific reservations to the CEDAW of each of the 17 countries. Although the majority of 17 nations (except Qatar) have ratified the CEDAW, the fact that most of these governments made specific reservations on some articles demonstrates the pervasiveness of these restrictions. Reservations have been concerning the realization of the principle of gender equality (Article 2); the right of women to acquire, change and retain a nationality and pass it on to their children (Article 9); the right of women to conclude contracts, administer property and be equal in all stages of court and

Table 3. Political participation of women in the Arab MENA region.

	Year received right to vote and stand for elections	% Female in governmental level (2005–2008)	% Seats in parliament held by women – lower house (2006)	% Seats in parliament held by women – upper house (2006)	Number of female ministers (2009)	Number of female parliament members (2009)
Algeria	1962 <sup>a</sup>	10.5 <sup>c</sup>	31.6 <sup>b</sup>	5.1 <sup>b</sup>	4 <sup>a</sup>	8 <sup>a</sup> (2011)
Bahrain	1973	8.7	0	15	1	1
Egypt	1956	5.9	2	6.8	2	8
Iraq	N/A	8.8 <sup>c</sup>	25.2 <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	82 <sup>b</sup> (2012)
Jordan	1974	10.7	5.5	12.7	4	7
Kuwait	2005	0	1.5	N/A	2	4
Lebanon	1952	6.9	4.7	N/A	1	6
Libya	N/A	N/A	16.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Morocco	1963	5.9	10.8	1.1	5	33
Oman	1994	10	2.4	15.5	2	2
Palestine	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Qatar	2003	7.7	0	N/A	2	0
Saudi Arabia	No right	0	0	N/A	0	0
Syria	1949, 1953 <sup>a</sup>	6.3 <sup>c</sup>	12	N/A	6 <sup>a</sup>	12 <sup>a</sup> (2011)
Tunisia	1959	7.1	22.8	13.4	1	40
UAE	2006	8	0	23	4	9
Yemen	1967, 1970 <sup>a</sup>	5.7 <sup>c</sup>	0.3	1.8	6 <sup>a</sup>	0 <sup>a</sup> (2011)

<sup>a</sup> Dubai Women Establishment (2009).

<sup>b</sup> Interparliamentary Union 2012 (<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>).

<sup>c</sup> The New Arab Women Forum (<http://www.nawforum.com/events/NAWF/5/profile/facts-and-figures>).

Table 4. Legal rights of women in terms of marriage, maternity and working conditions.

Country	Legal marriage age <sup>a</sup>	Equal divorce rights / women's divorce rights <sup>b</sup>	Maternity leave 2009 <sup>c</sup>	Amount of maternity leave benefits 2009 <sup>c</sup>	Signed CEDAWs, reservations <sup>d</sup>
Algeria	18 (f), 21 (m)	Yes	98 days (14 weeks)	100% social security	Yes (1996), 2, 9(2), 41, 43, 15 (4), 16, 29
Bahrain	16 (f), 18 (m)	-	60 days (9 weeks)	100% for 45 days then unpaid employer	Yes (2002), 2, 9(2), 15(4), 16 and 29(1)
Egypt	16 (f), 18 (m)	Yes	13 weeks	100% (75% social security and 25% employer)	Yes (1981), 2, 9(2), 16 and 29(2)
Iraq	18 (16*) (f), 18 (16*) (m)	Talaq No vs. Judicial Divorce Yes	62 days (9 weeks)	100% social security	Yes (1986), 2(f,g), 9(1,2), 16 and 29(1)
Jordan	18 (f), 18 (m)	Yes	70 days (10 weeks)	100% employer	Yes (1992), 9(2) and 16(1c,d,g)
Kuwait	15 (f), 17 (m)	No	70 days (10 weeks)	100% employer	Yes (1994), 7, 9(2), 16(f) and 29(1)
Lebanon	17 (f) (9*), 18 (m) (15*)	Yes	7 weeks	100% employer and social security	Yes (1997), 9(2), 16(1 c,d,f,g) and 29(1)
Libya	20	Yes by agreement	50 days (7 weeks)	50% employer (100% social security for self-employed)	Yes (1989), 2,16(c) (d)
Morocco	18 (f), 18 (m)	Yes	98 days (14 weeks)	100% social security	Yes (1993), 9(2), 16, 29
Oman	18 (f), 18 (m)	-	N/A	N/A	Yes (2006), 9(2), 15(4), 16(a,c,f) and 29(1)

(Continued)

Table 4 – continued

Country	Legal marriage age <sup>a</sup>	Equal divorce rights/ women's divorce rights	Maternity leave 2009 <sup>c</sup>	Amount of maternity leave benefits 2009 <sup>c</sup>	Signed CEDAWs, reservations <sup>d</sup>
Palestine	15 (f) (9*), 16 (m) (12*)	–	N/A	N/A	N/A
Qatar	–	–	50 days (7 weeks)	100% employer	No
Saudi Arabia	17 (f), 20 (m)	–	70 days (10 weeks)	50–100% employer	Yes (2000), 9(2) and 29(1)
Syrian Arab Republic	17 (f), 18 (m)	Yes	120 for the first child (17 weeks)	100% employer	Yes (2003), 2, 9(2), 15(4), 16(1c, d, f, g, 2) and 29(1)
Tunisia	20 (f), 20 (m)	Yes	30 days (4 weeks)	Two-thirds social security	Yes (1985), 9(2), 16(c)(d)(f)(g)(h) and 29(1)
UAE	–	–	45 days (6 weeks)	50–100% employer (100% after one year of continuous employment)	Yes (2006), 2(f), 9, 15(2), 16, 29(1)
Yemen	15 (f), 15 (m)	Yes	60 days (9 weeks)	100% employer	Yes (1984), 29(1)

Note: (f), for female; (m), for male.

\*Under guardian/judicial consent or by temporary royal/government decree.

<sup>a</sup> UN (2007).

<sup>b</sup> Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (2005).

<sup>c</sup> ILO (2010).

<sup>d</sup> UNDP (2009).

tribunal procedures (Article 15); and the right of women in marriage, divorce and child custody (Article 16).

In summary, the data from the regional reports suggest that there is variation between nations, and that although there are challenges facing Arab women, progress is evident on some dimensions. We now attempt to augment these findings by turning our attention to the relevant published peer-reviewed literature.

### ***Results II: critical review of peer-reviewed articles***

The review and content analysis of the peer-reviewed literature suggest two general trends in describing the macrolevel context: *Macrolevel Contextual Factor* and *Drivers for Change*. Both will be discussed in turn. First, the macrolevel contextual factors are defined as *the factors that constitute the general environment within which women live and work*. Our review suggests that there are seven interrelated categories of such macrolevel contextual factors that have figured (explicitly or implicitly) in the research on the region: (1) *socioeconomic factors*; (2) *demographic factors*; (3) *family networks and interpersonal connections*; (4) *government, legal frameworks, and legislation*; (5) *Islam*; (6) *patriarchy*; and (7) *Urf*. The second general trend concerns the drivers for change and these are defined as *the growing dynamic patterns of local and international behaviors, activities, movements that constitute entropic forces for positive change in favor of women*. Our review of the literature suggests that there are four categories of drivers discussed in the literature: (1) *government- and judicial-approved changes*; (2) *social globalization in terms of level of human rights, justice, inclusion*; (3) *national/regional socioeconomic development*; and (4) *women's movements and the initiatives of individuals*. [Table 5](#) summarizes both sets of emergent categories from the content analysis. In the following section, we will briefly describe each.

#### *Macrolevel issues relating to socioeconomic and demographic factors*

In the articles analyzed, it appears that researchers often refer to the wider socioeconomic and demographic factors when researching various phenomena concerning women at work in the region. Discussions of demographic factors often revolve around the theme of marital status/fertility as well as local labor trends. More specifically, the research suggests a context that is becoming more conducive to women having careers in some of the Arab countries. For example, in Jordan, there seems to be a trend of women getting married at an older age as well as an increase in work opportunities for women due to the migration of men outside the region in search of better employment opportunities (Miles 2002). This

Table 5. Emergent categories from academic literature used to describe the Arab MENA context.

	<i>Socioeconomic factors</i>
	<i>Demographic factors (e.g. marital status, fertility, labor trends)</i>
	<i>Patriarchy + Urf</i>
	<i>Islam + Urf</i>
	<i>Legal framework</i>
<i>Macrolevel contextual factors</i>	<i>Family networks and connections</i>
	<i>Government- and judicial-approved changes</i>
	<i>Western-based globalization</i>
	<i>National/regional socioeconomic development</i>
<i>Drivers for change</i>	<i>Women's movements and the initiatives of individuals</i>

migration of men has been noted as increasing opportunities for women in other Arab contexts as well (Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine 2005; Omair 2008). Furthermore, the increasing levels of urbanization, industrialization and mass schooling play an important role in the decline of fertility rates, and are perhaps a sign, according to Fargues (2003), of the weakening of patriarchy in the Arab MENA. Similarly Caldwell (1982) suggest that women's increasing agency in reproductive decision-making implies a transition toward greater openness to women's participation in work and other social activities in the region. Fargues (2003) argues, however, that Arab countries present a paradox of fertility decline without women's empowerment and that social conservatism is still reflected in very low labor force participation rate among married women.

Discussions of socioeconomic factors often revolve around the relationship between the prevailing gender ideologies rooted in patriarchal norms and the low economic participation of women in the region (Miles 2002; Jamali et al. 2005; Sidani 2005; Elamin and Omair 2010). Linked to this is the issue of gender segregation in the workplace. Occupational structures in the region are strongly gendered with the majority of women employed in health, education and social care (Metcalf 2008; Hutchings, Lirio and Metcalfe 2012). There is also evidence of vertical segregation with women concentrated in lower-level roles (Metcalf 2008, 2011a) with leadership positions typically reserved for men (Hutchings et al. 2012). Nevertheless, Moghadam (2010) notes that women have been recently moving into new professions that are in line with economic globalization trends (e.g. call centers, global banking and financial services, insurance agencies, consulting firms catering to foreign businesses, offices of international organizations, banks and high-end tourist shops). The normalization of women's employment is not happening uniformly across the Arab countries and might take longer to materialize in very rich countries such as Saudi Arabia where there is less economic pressure for women's employment (Elamin and Omair 2010).

#### *Macrolevel issues relating to patriarchy, Islam and legal frameworks*

The third major category that emerged from the content analysis was patriarchy and its intersection with Islam and legal frameworks. The Arab nations, it has been asserted, have many similar sociocultural aspects that dictate prominent patriarchal norms and practices. There is evidence to suggest many cases from the region where women are treated as second-class citizens (Joseph 1996), where there is a prevailing conservative orientation toward women both at work and home (Miles 2002; Sidani 2005; Omair 2008), and where conservative religious stances restrict women's opportunities in leadership and politics (Kassem 2012). For example, Abdalla (1996) found among a large sample of Kuwaiti and Qatari professionals, students and parents 'very conservative attitudes about women's roles, rights and responsibilities in the society' (p. 36), and concluded that in this region women are often locked in restrictive traditional gender roles.

Other researchers suggest, also in line with patriarchy, that there is a prevailing social view that women's chief responsibilities are as caretakers of the family and children (Al-Lamky 2007; Metcalfe 2007; Farahat 2009). It is quite common for gainful employment to not be considered part of a women's gender role (Miles 2002) and it is common to view homemakers as not contributing to the economy (Fargues 2005). Although these statements might not be true to the same extent across the 17 states examined here, Sidani (2005) argues that the prevailing cultural norms in the region, which are sometimes of tribal – not religious – origin, have generally put pressures on women's ability to involve themselves in the economic development of their societies (Sidani 2005). According to Miles (2002), other sociocultural factors that contribute to

discouragement include: 'the strength of family ties, the segregation of women and men to avoid social problems, cultural restrictions on women's mobility, the stigma attached to a husband whose wife works outside the home' (p. 414). Reinforcing this gender norm by minimizing women's need to work for wages is the strong social expectation that the primary responsibility of men is to support women and their families (Omair 2008). Marmenout (2009) evidenced that Emirati working women were 'careful not to overstep one's husband in earnings or promotions' (p. 20), and were expected to work for less hours than their husbands. She recounts that a woman once refused a promotion to avoid problems with her husband.

In discussing patriarchy as a macrolevel factor that impacts the careers of women, many of the researchers make a concerted effort to distinguish it from our fourth theme: Islam. For example, Rozario and Hilsdon (2006) highlight that an important distinction needs to be made between Islamic values and local cultural practices whereby the two are not synonymous. A better understanding of the differences in gender equality in this region needs to consider tribal-, Arab- and nation-related conservative customs rather than be simply relegated to a matter of Islamic conservatism (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif and Meyer 2007). Indeed, some suggest that it is not Islam that creates limitation and prohibits choices but rather patriarchal interpretations of Islam (Sidani 2005; Metcalfe 2007; Omair 2008). Furthermore, a number of Islamic feminists have argued that human rights are not contradictory to Islam and note variations in gender-related Islamic practices depending on the specific community examined (Bullock 2002). Indeed, Islamic feminism attempts to reconstruct dimensions of equality and empowerment in a different way, uniting many of the diverse voices of Arab women (Metcalfe 2011b).

The simultaneous consideration of patriarchy and Islam allows for an analysis of their interacting influences on women at work in the Arab MENA. These considerations can be quite complex and protracted. It begs the question of what are the mechanisms facilitating synergies or disharmony between the two. Two specific mechanisms to consider may be: (1) the role of 'Urf' or custom in establishing a framework of acceptable norms of behavior for any specific Muslim community; and (2) the interdependent role of Sharia'a and Urf within Islamic jurisprudence (Hakim 1994). Many of the traditional customs embedded in a community have no real reference to Islam but are the results of traditions, often even pre-Islamic, that have evolved over time (Bullock 2002). Muslim legal scholars recognize the importance of Urf as a mechanism for societal behavior and therefore as a potential source for establishing Islamic laws (Abdul Ghani 2011). Based on this, therefore, it becomes apparent not only how patriarchal customs can potentially become embedded within Islamic legal decisions, rulings and judgments, but also how changing dynamics of social customs can also become embedded. Indeed, social customs (patriarchal or otherwise) may, therefore, become a basis for Islamic jurisprudence (and therefore enacted laws) as long as they do not contravene any stipulation of a Sharia'a ruling from the Quran or Sunna (Ishak 1986). It has been argued that it is in this way that patriarchal cultural practices that are detrimental to women have entered Islamic law to a greater extent in some countries than in others (Bullock 2002). Different Islamic countries have varying Islamic traditions (Metcalfe 2007). For example, Syed (2010) explores the concept of modesty, its historical roots in Islam and its variant implications in today's Muslim majority countries. He argues Islamic modesty as represented by covering is subject to forces of context, history and ideology in the specific society such as, loose headscarf in Iran verses full dress burka in KSA. Hutchings, Mohannak and Sendjaya (2011) suggest further that the variant cultural and social practices that disadvantage women in the workplace derive from the variant nature of Islamic jurisprudence that is practiced in a particular nation.

Taken together, the literature suggests that Islam is a central macrolevel factor to consider, particularly in Muslim majority countries in the region. Sidani (2005) argues that 'Islam is still a major spiritual and social force in the Arab world and its impact has been persuasive on the lives of its people' (p. 502). Certainly, attempting to determine the manner in which Islam influences women's careers in the Arab MENA is a complex and multifaceted question which should be approached with an eye for detail and not generalizations. One of the clearest suggestions from our analysis of the literature is the need to overcome the stereotypical presentation of Islam as a monolithic and oppressive force that subjugates women and to move research in directions that explore both the positive, negative and neutral influence of Islam.

Furthermore, the results of the content analysis also suggest, similar to one of the main findings of the report review, that many of the national legal frameworks embody restrictive Islamic interpretations for women. For example, Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) note that in Saudi Arabia the 'constitution prevents gender equality by restricting their freedom to travel, to education and to work' (p. 262). Others suggest that in the region many women do not enjoy equal rights as citizens (Sidani 2005; Omair 2008). Based on this and similar statements in the literature, we derived our fifth theme: legal frameworks. These themes resonate well with what has been identified in the country reports discussed in the previous section. The combination of patriarchy, Urf and Islamic jurisprudence creates a rich and complex mesh of macrolevel factors shaping the opportunities for women at work. It is important to note that this 'shaping' is not static but rather dynamic and therefore subject to change. There are recent examples of positive changes for women as documented by, for example, Karam and Jamali (2013), Kassem (2012) and Metcalfe and Woodhams (2012).

#### *Macrolevel issues relating to family networks*

The content analysis suggests a sixth category frequently discussed in the literature that involves the dynamics and politics relating to family networks and interpersonal connections. In this region, the family lies at the core of society playing a major role in political, economic, social and religious spheres (Omair 2008; Karam and Kwantes 2011). People are conscious of each other's family membership, identity. Indeed, status and family links have often been evidenced to facilitate access to institutions, jobs and government services (McElwee and Al-Riyami 2003; Hutchings and Weir 2006; Smith, Huang, Harb and Torres 2011). For example, Hutchings et al. (2010) suggest that 'a number of respondents pointed to the role of *wasta* (interpersonal connections) in affecting women's opportunities and argued that such connections can override gender in the workplace' (p. 78). These authors also suggest that the positioning of women within, or in relation to, prominent wealthy families may create equal opportunities for employment in relation to their less well-connected male counterparts. Ahmad (2011a) found that Saudi female business entrepreneurs rely on business connections and funding sources based largely on family and family networks. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011b) similarly found that using *wasta* to get recruited, promoted and to fulfill career advancement objectives was perceived to be a critical factor in the Lebanese banking sector.

#### *Driving forces for change*

Beyond the macrolevel factors, the second major trend in the literature suggests interest in growing number of local and international efforts and initiatives that target the current status of women in the Arab MENA. These efforts are geared toward improvement and

development. In total, the analysis resulted in four drivers for change: *government- and judicial-approved changes; social globalization; national/regional socioeconomic landscape; and women's movements and the initiatives of individuals.*

At the top of the list are steps that have been taken by governments toward either: (1) ratifying or complying with international standards or recommendations concerning women's rights; or (2) supporting local women, women groups or women-centered initiatives to improve the status of women. Although focus on such positive governmental efforts was not commonly featured in the literature, Metcalfe (2008) notes a number of points in this regard. For example, she notes that 'all Arab states adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emphasizes gender equality and the empowerment of women' (Metcalfe 2008, p. 98) and that all these states (except for Qatar) have signed the CEDAW (albeit with some reservations, see Metcalfe 2007). Furthermore, many scholars note that at the national level, several Gulf states have introduced women's empowerment programs reflecting the recognition and importance of entrepreneurship for women's employment (Metcalfe 2007; Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh 2009; Ahmad 2011b; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al-Marzouqi and Forster 2011).

The second driver concerning the spread of western influence in the region (i.e. social globalization) has been noted as a macrolevel factor that complicates the experience of women at work. In their research on women doctors in Saudi Arabia, Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) suggest that women 'inhabit a western culture at work within an Islamic culture (in KSA) within a world that seems increasingly open to western influence' and that this complicates the analysis of these women's experiences. Bullock (2002) suggests that scholars need to be careful in reflecting on western influences in the region as it is a politicized and often controversial topic. Indeed she asserts that the aftermath of colonization creates politicized context of discussing women's development in the region. Gender reform is often clouded (or plagued) by accusation of being manifestation of westernization and colonization.

Change also occurs through the third driver; namely, socioeconomic development. These changes have been evidenced by both positive and negative developments in the economic landscape and in the levels of educational attainment (as noted earlier). On the positive side, researchers suggest that the economic globalization has increased opportunities for women in these economies (Miles 2002); and that dual-earner couples have become more acceptable because some find it difficult to manage on one income (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004). A working Arab woman is thus no longer an exception, but rather a growing trend in the region (Omair 2008). Furthermore in terms of educational trends, Omair (2008) suggests that Arab culture is submitting to modernization through education and that this may result in an increase in opportunities for women to contribute to economy. It has been noted that more women are enrolling in tertiary education (Bashshur 2007) and that the educational advances of women in the Arab MENA have been dramatic (Metcalfe 2008; Rutledge, Al-Shamsi, Bassioni and Al-Sheikh 2011). On the less negative side, the literature also suggests that the unstable economic and political situation in the region and the recent uprisings create efficiency arguments to force change. For example, Karam and Jamali (2013) suggest that the legitimacy derived from sticking to childrearing and domestic roles is increasingly undermined by clear evidence that women, when given the opportunity, have the potential to be successful and to ultimately contribute positively to the bottom-line of business and the formal economy. Here therefore conformity to rationalized myths and institutional rules promotes legitimacy, but this conformity conflicts with economic efficiency.

Finally, the last driver identified from the content analysis is organized efforts by individual women or groups of women to push the gender agenda forward in the region. This final driver reaffirms the pattern noted in the review of the reports. Indeed, as Moghadam (2004) discusses, a number of women’s movements have been mobilized in the region. For example, there are a number of constraints restricting collective mobilization in many of the Arab countries where there has been an absence of female networking spaces (Al-Dabbagh 2008). A number of official and informal female networks focused on business, professional and academia are appearing across the region (Karam and Jamali 2013). Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010) describe the role of women-led non-profit organizations in enhancing women’s confidence and negotiation skills. Similarly, Al-Kazi (2011) describes women’s NGO’s in Kuwait and their efforts to lobby government to situate themselves as key stakeholders in national HR development planning.

There is also an increased pattern of individual initiatives on the part of women living and working within these various nations. Individual initiative has been discussed in the literature in terms of the increased entrepreneurial development among women (Jamali 2009). In Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, UAE and Bahrain, significant gains in politics, leadership and management roles have also been evidenced (Metcalf 2008). Some examples include Dala Ghandour, a young female Lebanese Lawyer, who became an independent candidate for Beirut municipality elections in May 2010; Bahraini entrepreneur Ms Huda Janahi, founder and CEO of Global Cargo and Traveler’s Services Co, who made it to *Forbes* Magazine among the top 50 most powerful Arab women in 2009; and Amina Taher, an Emirati MBA graduate from the London Business School and Communications Manager at Mubadala Development, one of the Abu Dhabi Government’s investment companies. These are but three women who have taken brave individual steps toward positive change. Jamali, Safieddine and Daouk (2007) note the important role that individual women play as directors, board members and managers to help the establishment of a more equitable and fair workplace in terms of HR and other organizational policies and practices.

Based on this critical review of the literature, we have identified key macrolevel factors and drivers for change that make up the first level of our multilevel model (see Figure 1). To identify similarly important factors at the organizational level, we turn our attention to archival data drawn from the websites of universities across the region.

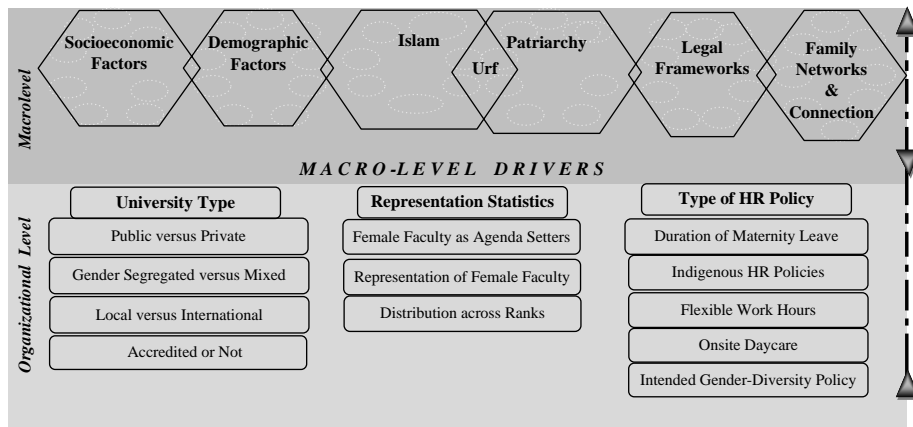


Figure 1. Multilevel model of factors shaping the experiences of women at work in Arab MENA.

## Part II: empirical datasets – representation and HR policies

In this section, we examine gender-related HR policies and practices in the Arab MENA. We focus our empirical investigation on publicly available data concerning the number of women in various professorial ranks as well as data on HR policies from these institutions. Based on the compiled dataset, we provide descriptive statistics on women's representation and HR policies. Our aim is to inform the second level of our model with relevant organizational-level factors.

In the Arab MENA region, the statistics on female representation in academia are unclear. In fact, no articles could be found in scholarly databases. Despite a number of UNESCO reports, which focused on Arab MENA higher education (Bashshur 2007), none presented faculty representation statistics but rather focused on student representation. Statistics on representation in western academic institutions is more readily available. In western universities, historically, representation of women has been low. A review of relevant studies suggests, for example, that 39% of full-time faculty positions in the USA are occupied by women (West and Curtis 2006). A closer look at specific universities suggests that at Yale women compose 31% of total faculty (Subrahmanyam 2007) and at Georgia Tech women make up 13% of faculty in the rank of full professors (de Cohen and Clewell 2007). This seems to be quite representative of the general decline in percentage as one moves up in rank and examines full professorial positions held by women in western academic institutions (Ash, Carr, Goldstein and Friedman 2004; West and Curtis 2006). The picture is similar in Europe where only 15% of full professors are women (European Commission 2010). Despite many efforts undertaken by feminist interest groups and university administrators to increase women's representation in the West, the challenge remains.

A main thrust of these efforts to increase representation has been to gender HR policies and practices. Traditionally, universities have organized academic careers based on the male life patterns, making it more difficult for women to advance their careers while building a family (Armenti 2004; Moen and Sweet 2004). Although an academic career provides more freedom and autonomy than most 'higher-level' endeavors, there are, according to Bailyn (2003), some characteristics that make it particularly demanding. An academic must fulfill the multiple roles of teaching, research and service, both to the university and the profession. Moreover, there is a prevailing long-hour culture in academia that renders the conciliation between work and life, and parenting in particular, a very difficult endeavor (Raddon 2002; Acker and Armenti 2004; Jacobs and Winslow 2004; Doherty and Manfredi 2006). These challenges have been cited as major explanations for the under-representation of women in the academy. In response to these challenges, university administrators, at least in some contexts, have put great effort into developing and implementing HR policies geared toward alleviating some of the pressures and increasing the representation of women. These policies have often been referred to as family-friendly policies (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness 1999; Poelmans and Sahibzada 2004).

The implementation of such policies within universities has had a positive impact on the gender composition of faculty. Bailyn (2003), for example, describes the experiences of women faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the progress that was made through active discussions to share experiences. Through these efforts, and by partnering with top administration, their concerns about lack of family-friendly environment were put on the agenda. As a result, the number of women in the faculty at MIT increased. This and other similar examples can be seen in universities across North

America, Europe and other Western contexts. It is unclear whether similar policies have been implemented in the Arab MENA.

Indeed, research on HR in the Arab MENA in general is a relatively nascent area of focus. Though there has been an increase in the number of articles that examine various aspects of HR in the region (see Afiouni, Karam and El-Hajj 2012 for a review), the intersection between HR and gender is still largely ignored. There are some notable exceptions including the work of, for example, Metcalfe (2007) and Tlaiss and Kauser (2011a,c). More effort is needed to examine the intersectionality between the macrolevel factors identified earlier in this paper and the shaping of HR policy/practice within universities in the region. Our efforts in this section are therefore to compile a preliminary dataset so that an initial assessment of representation and relevant HR policies in academia in the region can be made. We rely solely on publicly available data accessible through university websites. Along this line therefore, we are interested in examining *the current representation of women as well as the existent 'family-friendly' HR policies as shared on the publicly available websites of Arab MENA institutions of higher education.*

### ***Methodology***

Our search for relevant information about universities in the region included as a first step, contacting the Ministry of Higher Education in each country. The response rate of the ministries of Higher Education was poor. Next, we compiled a list of private and public universities by searching through the official website of the association of Arab universities (<http://www.aaru.edu.jo>) as well as electronic lists of universities in each country. In total, 106 universities were identified through this website. We then identified universities that are accredited with recognized associations in the USA, UK and France (e.g. Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, American Academy for Liberal Education, Accrediting Council for Independent Schools and Colleges, British Accreditation Council). Fifteen private universities were identified in this manner. We then searched for universities in the Arabic-speaking MENA nations that are included in world rankings on Webometrics and THE-QS World University Ranking websites, as well as the Braintrack university search website. In total, 136 universities are ranked or present on these websites. The total number of universities included in the overall search (excluding any duplicates) was 234.

Finally, we employed four research assistants to examine the websites of each university to search for publicly available data on (1) basic demographic data about these universities; (2) the percentage of women faculty in each university and across various academic ranks; and (3) faculty handbooks, HR policy documents, university rules and regulations, and similar administration-issued documents. The search was done in Arabic, French and English as these are the languages most commonly used in the various university websites visited. We were cautious not to restrict our search for policies as framed in the western literature to make sure that we did not exclude possible indigenous HR policies that may be framed differently. For example, we did not simply code for 'family-friendly' or 'maternity/parental leave'; but rather we carefully read through each benefit and provision to identify relevant policies.

### ***Results III: publicly available university data***

The characteristics of the universities that posted information about HR policies and gender representation statistics are summarized in [Table 6](#). The data include information

Table 6. Data available on university websites concerning university type.

Country	Number in sample	Accreditation	Public or private			Mixed university?			Research-based or teaching?	
			Public	Private	N/A	Mixed	Segregated	Both	Teaching	
Algeria	16	0	12	1	3	11	0	14	0	
Bahrain	12	0	2	10	0	11	1	8	4	
Egypt	31	2	15	16	0	25	3	28	3	
Iraq	19	1	16	1	2	7	7	14	1	
Jordan	25	1	14	11	0	22	1	22	1	
Kuwait	5	0	1	4	0	4	0	4	1	
Lebanon	22	6	1	21	0	22	0	15	7	
Libya	9	0	7	2	0	9	0	8	1	
Morocco	8	0	8	0	0	7	0	7	0	
Oman	5	0	1	4	0	4	1	4	1	
Qatar	3	0	1	2	0	3	0	3	0	
Saudi Arabia	19	1	14	5	0	1	12	16	2	
Syria	14	0	5	7	2	9	0	10	1	
Tunisia	3	0	2	1	0	3	0	3	0	
UAE	14	3	4	10	0	11	0	12	2	
Palestinian Territories	12	0	3	5	4	11	0	11	1	
Yemen	17	1	8	8	1	0	11	12	0	
Total	234	15	114	108	12	160	36	191	25	

about university type (public/private, mixed/gender segregated, teaching/research/both, accredited/non-accredited) as well as information pertaining to HR policies. In total, 45 universities drawn from the 17 countries (19.23% of the total sample) included such information on their website. The data suggest that only 6.4% of universities sampled were accredited by international bodies, 51% of universities were public while 49% were private. Furthermore, 18% were segregated by gender, while 82% of these universities were mixed. Finally, 88% of the universities were both research- and teaching-oriented, while 12% focused on teaching alone.

Information was available concerning the representation of women in the faculty body for 26 of the 234 universities (11.11%) drawn from 13 of the 17 countries examined. Although our final sample is limited, the data collected are quite striking. The percent of women represented in the sample differs within and between countries. The range extends from 9% at Sana'a University College in Yemen to 60% at King Abdulaziz University College in Saudi Arabia, with an average number of 32.8% female faculty members at any rank across all universities sampled (see [Table 7](#)). Thirteen universities have 40–51%, six have less than 20% and two have less than 10% of their faculty composed of women. These appear to suggest a high rate of female faculty representation.

A closer examination of female representation by academic rank suggests that, similar to the data from western-based academic institutions, women are concentrated at the lower levels of the hierarchy. This bottom-heavy distribution of female faculty is captured in [Table 8](#). Of the 234 universities explored, seven provided faculty data by rank. At the assistant and associate professor rank, the representation of women ranges from 1.3% (UAE) to 36.8% (Algeria) and from 0% (Yemen and Syria) to 10.7% (Qatar), respectively. At the full professor rank the picture is the bleakest with the range extending from 0% (Yemen) to 5.4% (Lebanon). The data here suggest a similar pattern in the Arab MENA as has been documented in Europe and the USA (European Commission 2010). Taken together, results from the representation and distribution statistics suggest concrete additions to the hypothetical model at the organizational level of theory (see [Figure 1](#)). In the following section, we examine one likely relevant set of organizational factors, namely, HR policies. These policies might help us better understand the reasons behind this low and bottom-heavy representation of women in academia in this region.

### *University HR policy results*

At first glance, the compiled list of HR policies suggests that sampled universities could develop policies that are more family-friendly. For example, we found that the availability of on-site daycares is rare (10 universities only in 4 countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE); and that the maternity leaves are short (ranging from 30 in Tunisia to 98 days in Algeria and Morocco). On the basis of the maternity leave provisions, we can cluster countries into three groups: countries offering maternity provisions that just meet the International Labor Organization's (2010) 14-week recommendation (Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and UAE). Countries with moderate maternity leave provisions (Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (70 days) as well as Yemen and Iraq (60 days) make up the second cluster. The third cluster of countries includes countries offering weak maternity provisions (30 days in Tunisia, 45 in Bahrain, 49 in Lebanon, 50 in Libya and Syria). Explicit Equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies appear to be rare (with 25 universities listing information regarding this: 18 yes and 7 no) and the same can be said about sexual harassment and anti-discrimination policies (see [Table 9](#)).

Table 7. Representation of women data available on Arab MENA university websites.

Country	University name	% Female faculty	Accredited	Public/private	Male/female
Algeria	Saad Dahlab Blida	41.4	No	Public	Mixed
Algeria	Qasntenah University	43.0	No	Public	Mixed
Egypt	Al-Azhar University	27.0	No	Public	Segregated
Egypt	American University in Cairo	50.7	Yes	Private	Mixed
Iraq	Thi Qar University	19.9	No	Public	Mixed
Iraq	University of Basrah	41.2	No	Public	
Iraq	University of Baghdad	43.7	No	Public	
Jordan	Hashemite University	25.5	No	Public	Segregated
Kuwait	American University of Kuwait	41.0	Yes	Private	Mixed
Lebanon	American University of Beirut	40.9	Yes	Private	Mixed
Lebanon	Lebanese American University	41.8	Yes	Private	Mixed
Oman	Sultan Qaboos University	40.7	No	Public	
Oman	Al Zahra University	43.0	No	Private	Female only
Oman	Majan University	43.0	No	Private	Mixed
Palestinian territories	Al-Khalil University (Hebron)	9.3	No	Private	Mixed
Palestinian territories	Al-Quds University	14.6	No	Private	Mixed
Palestinian territories	Al-Quds Open University	26.0	No	Public	
Palestinian Territories	Birzeit University	26.3	No	Private	Mixed
Qatar	Qatar University	36.9	No	Public	Mixed
Qatar	College of the North Atlantic – Qatar	41.0	No	Private	Mixed
Saudi Arabia	King Abdulaziz University	60.0	No	Public	Segregated
Syria	Damascus University	16.0	No	Public	Mixed
UAE	UAE University	16.4	No	Public	Mixed
UAE	American University of Dubai	27.7	Yes	Private	Mixed
UAE	Sharjah University	28.0	No	Public	Mixed
Yemen	Sanaa' University	9.0	No	Public	Segregated

Table 8. Distribution of female faculty data available on Arab MENA university websites.

Country	University	% Professor	% Associate professor	% Assistant professor
Algeria	Qasntenah University	2.7	7.1	32.3
	Saad Dahlab Blida	0.8	3.2	36.8
Lebanon	American University of Beirut	5.4	5.8	17.0
Qatar	Qatar University	3.5	10.8	14.5
Syria	Damascus University	2.8	0	5.1
Yemen	Sanaa' University	0	0	2.3
UAE	UAE University	0.8	6.4	1.3

An examination of the university policies further reveals that diversity initiatives are an item on the agendas of decision-makers. However, these diversity initiatives are not oriented toward the fair and equitable employment of women and disadvantaged groups. Instead, they aim to attract international faculty from various countries. Indeed, 50% of EEO statements explicitly mention foreign faculty. Furthermore, our cautious examination (i.e. beyond a western-based lens) of the HR policies suggests the existence of indigenous policies which appear to accommodate the Islamic duties of practicing Muslims. For example, faculties are permitted to take leave to fulfill their duty of *Hajj*. Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam and is required of every able-bodied Muslim who can financially afford the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia (Shariati 2005). Table 10 summarizes the identified HR policies and explicates the policy and its grounding within Islam. Our preliminary data suggest that such Islamic-based HR policies appear to be more commonly offered in GCC countries as well as in Egypt, Jordan and Libya, than across the Arab MENA in general. Taken together, this compiled and critical review of the HR policy data suggests that further organizational-level additions to the hypothetical model may be useful. This may include, for example, maternity-level duration, indigenous HR policies, etc. (see Figure 1).

### General discussion on gender, HR and potential avenues for regional development

Edward Said once wrote that there is a need to move discussions about the Arab world beyond an Orientalist representation of this region as locked in an unchanging, mysterious culture (Said 1979). Indeed, the recent uprisings, regime changes and civil unrest spreading throughout the region have jolted researchers and onlookers to acknowledge the non-static dynamics of the region. Adding to this, considerations concerning the Arab Spring (or 'Arab Awakening') create a space and a momentum for scholars to reflect on the contextual potential for change, and simultaneously, on the potential for policy, practice and representation change within HR systems in local organizations. HR researchers can substantially contribute to a better understanding of a myriad of factors existing on the interface between the macrolevel and organizational level and how this shapes potential for HR as well as the development possibilities for HR value creation for regional stakeholders.

There are many groups that are frustrated with the *status quo* and, as is often the case with disadvantaged groups, many are beginning to position themselves as contenders for change (Fligstein 1997). Indeed, we see a rise in both exogenous and endogenous change efforts across the region. Scholars interested in this rise are more and more engaged in outlining frameworks and models that can assist to better understand the context for the specific forces augmenting/dissipating these change efforts. Metcalfe (2011), for example, proposes a framework for conceptualizing a national HR development model that places

Table 9. Family-friendly HR policies data available on Arab MENA university websites.

<i>HR policy – Family Friendly</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>%</i>
	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>			
Equal employment opportunities	18 <sup>a</sup>	7.7	7	3.0	209	Unknown	89.3
Diversity policy	35 <sup>b</sup>	15.0	4	1.7	195	Unknown	83.3
Sexual harassment policies	14	6.0	8	3.4	212	Unknown	90.6
Anti-discrimination policies	22	9.4	4	1.7	208	Unknown	88.9
Freeze the promotion clock during maternity leave	3	1.3	2	0.9	229	Unknown	97.9
Child daycare	10	4.3	1	0.4	223	Unknown	95.3
Work schedule	22	9.40	20	8.55	192	Unknown	82.05
Medical coverage	15	6.41	Faculty and dependants 29	12.39	190	Unknown	81.20
Tuition fees coverage	14	5.98	Partial 6	2.56	214	Unknown	91.45

<sup>a</sup> 9/18 refer specifically to expatriates.

<sup>b</sup> 22/35 refer specifically to expatriates.

Table 10. University human resource policies that appear to accommodate Islamic duties.

<i>Indigenous HR policy</i>	<i>Specification</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Link to Islam</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<i>Hajj leave</i>	Leave permitted to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Saudi Arabia).	Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Palestine	In Islam, <i>hajj</i> is the fifth pillar. It is a duty of every able-bodied (and financially able) Muslim to visit Mecca at least once in their lifetime.	Shariati (2005)
<i>Medical escort leave for wife or wives</i>	Leave permitted in order for a male faculty member to escort his wife or wives for medical consultations/procedures.	Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	In Islam, the issue of <i>escorts</i> is a debated practice in the Muslim world. Although no limitation or prohibition against women's traveling alone is mentioned in the Quran, there are some Islamic sects that require women to travel with a <i>mahram</i> (escort or unmarried relative).	Al-Kawthari (1999)
<i>Medical coverage for family and families</i>	Medical coverage as part of the faculty benefit package in which men are permitted to cover members of more than one family.	Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	In Islam, polygamy is allowed and practiced under certain restricted conditions. Muslim men are allowed to have more than one wife at the same time, up to a total of four.	Ghamidi (2002)

Some Muslim-majority countries have Islamic law (*sharia' a*) which permits polygamy.

(Continued)

Table 10 – continued

Indigenous HR policy	Specification	Countries	Link to Islam	Reference
Long bereavement leave ( <i>idda</i> )	Leave permitted in order for a female faculty to fulfill a <i>period of waiting</i> either after the death of her husband or after a divorce.	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	In Islam, a woman must observe a period of waiting after the death of her husband or after a divorce. The actual number of days is calculated based on a woman's menses (usually three months after divorce and four months and ten days after death). During this period she may not 'remarry' (sexual interaction) another man. <i>Iddah</i> was intended to guarantee the paternity of any children.	Esposito (2003)
Daily prayer breaks ( <i>salah</i> )	Regularly scheduled breaks are permitted throughout the work-day for Muslim faculty for prayer.	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	In Islam, prayer is one of the five pillars (for Sunni Muslims) and one of the ten practices (for Shi'a Muslims). Prayer has prescribed conditions, procedures and times. <i>Salah</i> is obligatory for all adult Muslims.	Hedayetullah (2006)
Ramadan working hours	Reduced hours of work for all employees during the month of Ramadan	Qatar, UAE	Ramadan is the Islamic month of fasting, where eating, drinking and sexual relations are not engaged in from dawn until sunset, social understanding	Robinson (1999)

gender at center stage and Arab women's empowerment as a primary objective. She argues in favor of the value of a gender lens in HR investigations in Islamic states and that by adopting such a lens, national HR development planning and initiatives can more fully embrace national skill formation and socioeconomic development for positive developmental change. Such research highlights the need for approaching HR management in the region by stepping within the particularities of the region. Here, Badran (2005), Metcalfe (2008) as well as Karam and Jamali (2013) acknowledge the importance of defining indigenously relevant HR systems and not merely HR systems adopted from the west.

Our work in this paper was conducted in alignment with this sentiment. We have attempted to adopt an indigenous lens and explore both the contextual factors that have traditionally characterized the work of women in the region and the current status of local academic women. Considering both, we believe, is useful as it allows for the simultaneous juxtaposition of current realities and future opportunities and barriers. Indeed, in general, the contextual realities and the drivers for change interact with each other as well as with other international, organizational and individual factors to shape the experiences of women at work and the possibilities to change these experiences. This therefore suggests a multilevel perspective for localizing and better understanding women's work experiences in the Arab MENA.

Moving beyond the macrolevel, our paper further incorporates organizational considerations by examining the presence of HR policies within our focal sector of interest, namely, academia in the Arab world. Morley et al.'s (2006) research on gender and higher education suggests a variety of such drivers for change including at the international level (e.g. human rights initiatives, social justice and inclusion agendas); macrolevel (e.g. public-sector reform, economic legislations, economic and social development agendas; women movements and networks, state welfare) and the organizational level (e.g. affirmative action, governance; learning environments need to be made safe for women) of analysis. Her work on the commonwealth nations in Africa suggests general patterns similar to our findings in the current study, such as the underrepresentation of women in senior positions and roles in higher education institutions as well as the gendered micropolitical experiences of women within these institutions (Morley et al. 2006). Our results not only suggest similar results in the Arab MENA, but they are also particularly alarming in the context of developmental efforts. Researchers, policy-makers and HR practitioners alike view higher education as the context within which knowledge, skills and expertise are essential for positive socioeconomic development of these nations overall (World Bank 2005; UNDP 2009). Our findings therefore suggest that the road to development is still long. In the discussion that follows, we attempt to reflect specifically on the cross-level implications of our identified macrolevel factors for HR policy development in Arab universities. We attempt to do this in a systematic way by reflecting the cross-level implications of some of these factors and the related drivers for change on HR practices in the region.

### *Discussion of the empirical data and content analysis*

Our review of the reports and literature assists us to construct a multilevel model that we believe can help to initiate a more localized gender perspective about the experiences of women in academia (and indeed at work) in the Arab MENA. Although certainly not complete, our model depicts factors that may influence these women at two levels of analysis, namely, the macrolevel and organizational level. Within each level as well as

across both levels, there are a number of complex and multifaceted influences that shape the context within which women live and work.

Although more data are needed to complete the model, the initial suggestion is that the door is not yet fully open for women to join the workforce. Although the data from the country reports (step one) suggest that access to higher education has significantly increased for women seeking an education, the number of women employed in higher education remains low. Looking at female employment in other sectors suggests similarly low representation, if not a lower representation (World Bank 2004). This suggests a 'bursting pipeline' of sorts where more and more Arab women are prepared with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities, but are unable to secure employment. Indeed, Moghadam (2004) provides further support for this phenomenon when she describes the:

growing number of educated, mobile, employed and politically aware women who are suffering, as are the rest of the population, from the fall-out of the global economic crises and regional labor crises. However women continue to be the subject to discrimination, oppression, and gender inequality. This is particularly poignant as it is occurring at a time where economic, political and cultural globalization is salient and ever present. (p. 15)

Furthermore, drawing from the UAE and Saudi, Rutledge et al. (2011) suggest that even despite policy-makers' efforts toward women-friendly labor nationalization policies, only marginal increases in female participation rates have resulted. These authors further suggest that more systemic labor market reforms are needed to dissipate this bulge in female unemployment. In contrast to the Leaking Pipeline in the West (Blickenstaff 2005; Global Human Capital Gender Advisory Council 2008), it appears that here the pipeline is beginning to bulge adding to the frustration felt throughout the region.

Empirical exploration of the possible sources of this pipeline block beyond patriarchal biases and gender stereotypes is an important area for future research. Recent work by Kassem (2012) and Karam and Jamali (2013) attempt to dissect variant and protracted forces which may be sustaining such blocks. Furthermore, researchers need to reflect on what efforts can be undertaken and what drivers for change can be augmented to help dissipate this growing budge. Some interesting questions to reflect on include: can legitimate cultural mechanisms be identified through which change is possible? Perhaps a closer examination of the discourse and events surrounding women's access to education in the region contrasted against the discourse and events surrounding women's political participation and economic empowerment would help to provide insight in this regard. Why is there a large disparity in economic participation and opportunity, as well as in political empowerment between men and women in the region? By what cultural-specific mechanisms are women gaining access to education and how can we transfer such mechanisms to the political and economic realm? This type of reflection needs a more nuanced exploration of context vis-à-vis the shifting/static rights for women. For example, if we examine educational attainment and simultaneously reflect on the legal rights, socioeconomic status of women in Saudi Arabia versus Bahrain, one would need to explore what are the contextual differences that allow for such major between-nation differences in Bahrain, but not in Saudi Arabia. What is different? Can we outline predictable patterns for conducive factors versus less conducive factors? Are there patterns of similarity and/or differences between the various ethnic, religious communities (e.g. Christian communities) across the region? Overall, such questions need to be grounded within the greater macrolevel patterns existent within the region. From our review, it is clear that there are not only some macrolevel factors which certainly work to restrict women, but also a growing number of factors that are working to promote positive developmental changes in favor of women.

The preliminary data collected on HR policies from regional universities suggest that very little is being done to establish women-centric family-friendly environment. There appears to be ample room for policy improvement (e.g. duration of maternity leave, childcare support and mentoring programs) in academic institutions across the region. Of the HR policies that were documented, many appeared to be geared toward facilitating a balance between work and Islamic duties such as Hajj leave, long bereavement leave, daily prayer breaks, etc. Overall, these policies do not seem to be female friendly but remain instead male-centric as has also been suggested by other HR scholars (Syed 2010).

Furthermore, between-country variation in HR policies also seems to exist such that there is the suggestion of a relationship between maternity leave policies within a country and that country's rank on the gender indices. Countries faring the worst have the longest maternity leave duration provisions. For example, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt each rank low on these indices and each provide female faculty with 60–90 days of maternity leave. This range of 60–90 days is the longest maternity leave duration in the region. The opposite is not true such that there is no detected link between countries ranking high on these indices and the provision of shorter durations for maternity leave. One possible interpretation of this finding, as noted earlier, may relate to the prevailing social view that a woman's chief responsibilities are as caregivers (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004; Jamali et al. 2005) and this can be interpreted in terms of patriarchal assumptions (Moghadam 2005) or in terms of complementarity assumptions (Metcalf 2008). Future research needs to approach such findings with caution.

When examining for between-university variation in both HR policies and female representation, the data suggest a potential link between university type (i.e. private/public) and sexual harassment policy provisions. It would appear that universities that have specific sexual harassment policy (14 out of the 22 universities sampled) tend to be private institutions. Such variations between public and private affiliation is an interesting area for future examination. Indeed, regional isomorphic patterns for HR guidelines have not taken root and therefore there appears to be room for collaborative development in this regard.

Our hypothetical, multilevel model suggested key factors that are essential in better understanding the greater context of gender, higher education, HR policies and regional development in the Arab region. We believe that a closer critical reflection of these macrolevel factors in light of their cross-level implication of HR is of paramount importance for future research in this area. In the remainder of this section, we explore the implications of our identified macrolevel factors on HR policies and practices. We consider these factors in the following order: socioeconomic, demographic, legal frameworks, family and interpersonal connections and finally taken together – Islam, patriarchy and Urf.

#### *Socioeconomic factors shaping HR policies*

The importance of taking socioeconomic factors into account when examining indigenous HR policies in the region is of paramount importance as it is a fundamental guiding mechanism for HR development. For example, the move away from a reliance on oil- and mineral-related industries suggests significant shifts in socioeconomic realities, in that diversification becomes necessary and therefore key changes to the labor supply also become necessary. Metcalfe (2006) suggests that with the new demands for diversification, employment concerns and the related HR policies and practices, become

necessarily gendered. At the same time, however, the need for HR policies and practices that positively target women is met with the traditional macrolevel forces derived from Islam, patriarchy, Urf, legal frameworks and other contextual factors disadvantaging women. These latter forces create reluctance on the part of many private-sector companies to employ women. Many employers, for example, cite the additional costs incurred because of the need to provide maternity provisions as a reason not to recruit and hire women (Al-Lamki 2000; Wirth 2001). Moreover, under worsening economic conditions, there is evidence for an increase in dual-career couples and therefore an influx of women into new sectors (Jamali 2009). This influx however, is not being met with appropriate development of legal frameworks in terms of employment rights and provisions leaving women to accept working conditions and compensations that would not have been acceptable under normal conditions (Jamali et al. 2005). More efforts are needed in the region to review and develop both employment law with a gender lens and HR policies that facilitate women's fair and equitable participation and inclusion in the workforce.

#### *Demographic factors shaping HR policies*

Demographic trends in the region are also key points to the development and establishment of indigenous HR policies for the region. Harry (2007) highlights the high rates of population growth in GCC countries and points to the large numbers of young people entering the employment market. Corroborating this claim, the World Bank (2012) estimates that 40% of the Arab world population is under 14 and therefore the pressures on the employment market are continuously increasing. Adding to this dire situation, Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2011) highlight the alarmingly increase in the number of non-nationals working in the gulf countries which is creating an ever increasing demographic imbalance in these countries. Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2011) further suggest a near saturation of employment in the public sector, augmenting the challenges facing women seeking employment who tend to gravitate to this sector. The demographic imbalance coupled with the public employment saturation can thus make it harder on women to access the labor market which creates the need for HR policies to facilitate women's access to employment in other formal sectors as well. The number of women employed in the informal sector is alarming in this region as well (Carr and Chen 2004). Indeed, national and non-national women remain concentrated in the hidden areas of the informal economy (e.g. domestic laborers, assistants in family enterprises). Under such circumstances, they endure difficult employment status, low irregular or no remuneration and little or no access to social security or protection (Chant and Pedwell 2008). Considerations concerning HR management in the regional informal economy are a promising area for HR scholars to explore further.

#### *Gendered legal frameworks shaping HR policies*

The state of the laws governing female rights to employment and equity and justice at work are largely lacking as suggested by the regional reports reviewed earlier. This suggests that the legal frameworks can, at best, serve as a floor for gendered HR policies. A delicate balance needs to be struck between compliance to restrictive, often discriminatory laws and the development of HR policies that incorporate an indigenous gendered discourse. Legislation surrounding nationalization policies in gulf countries is an interesting terrain for gender considerations of HR policy development. There are many challenges facing HR practitioners implementing nationalization policies within

organizations (Harry 2007; Mellahi 2007), and creating a space for serious gender considerations within these challenges may suggest some important avenues for solution-oriented actions. Metcalfe (2006), for example, suggests that the state-led labor nationalization in Bahrain, Oman and Jordan has had the positive effect of increasing female labor force participation in these countries. Moreover, Williams, Bhanugopan and Fish (2011) point that many countries undergoing the process of nationalization have identified the need for a strong educational background if they are to ensure the participation of nationals in the workforce. This, therefore, creates room for women to be stuck within the pipeline as described above. Adaptation of HR practices to support nationalization policies create the need to change recruitment and selection practices, education and training, career management, reward systems and employee management (Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim and Rutledge 2011), and therefore potentially open opportunities for positive developments for women.

#### *Family and interpersonal connections shaping HR policies*

The development and establishment of indigenous HR policies for the region cannot overlook the importance of family ties and family networks in the Arab World (McElwee and Al-Riyami 2003; Hutchings and Weir 2006; Harry 2007; Elamin and Omair 2010). Al-Hamadi, Budhwar and Shipton (2007) further suggest that HR is likely shaped by a trilogy of forces, namely, Islam, tribe and family. Islam is at the top of the triangle with its effects on all aspects of life. Tribe and family form the base of the triangle. There is potential tension where policies and practices in line with Islamic law supersede family and tribal allegiances. Interestingly, other research suggests that family ties (i.e. *wasta*) appear to override gender in some employment-related decisions. Indeed, Tlaiss and Kauser (2011b) surveyed 200 managers in the Arab World and 80% of the respondents perceived *wasta* as more important than gender for recruitment as well as managerial progression up the company hierarchy.

#### *Islam, Urf and patriarchy shaping HR policies*

Of all the macrolevel factors considered in our study, it appears that Islam and the intersection between Islam, Urf and patriarch continuously tended to dominate analysis of pressures and forces within the region. The importance of taking these into account when examining indigenous HR policies in the region is clear. Indeed, much of the HR literature on the Arab world considers the interplay between Islam and HR policies and practices (e.g. Al-Hamadi et al. 2007; Ali 2010; Branine and Pollard 2010; Hashim 2010; Mellahi and Budhwar 2010; Syed and Ali 2010; Khan, Farooq and Hussain 2011). What is largely lacking from this discussion however are considerations of gender. Most work in this area appears to adopt a more gender neutral or implicit male-centric approach. Nonetheless, there are important suggestions that can inform steps toward development of more gender-related HR policies from the Islamic perspective. Syed and Ali (2010), for example, in their important discussion of Islam and employment relations, explore principal Islamic texts and suggest a normative Islamic frame for shaping HR policies and practices in Muslim-majority countries. The authors caution however that whether normative Islamic principles can be readily translated into practice through HR policy can be very difficult at best. Evidence of this difficulty may come from the research by Jamali, Abdallah and Hmaidan (2011) who demonstrate a duality between rhetoric and practice when it comes to diversity management initiatives in Lebanese organizations. Questions about how best

to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice are continuously emerging in the HR literature.

Though rare, specific research tackling gender and these macrolevel factors include the works of Metcalfe (2007) and Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011) who suggest that one cannot understand the complexity of gender and HR processes without connecting to broader social and economic debates relating to the rights of women in Islamic nations (Metcalfe 2007). In her paper and in her subsequent work (Metcalfe 2008; Hutchings and Metcalfe *in press*), Metcalfe specifically highlights the role of Islam, Urf and their patriarchal interpretations in shaping gender-related HR policies in the region. In her study on Arab professional women working in Bahrain, Metcalfe (2007) found that the concept of an organization having a policy relating to maternity and return to work, on-site childcare and flexible work arrangement was not really considered as it was expected that women would naturally look after their children and leave work (protective socialization). She further argues that the lack of HR policies that are concerned with equality issues reflect the equal but different philosophy underpinning Islam (Metcalfe 2007, 2008). Complementarity and related factors appear to be shaping HR procedures and practices as equality does not seem to be considered a guiding principle of Islamic Shar'ia (Metcalfe 2007). What specific implication do Islamic notions of complementarity have for HR policies and practices? How can Urf be used as a mechanism to push gender-friendly HR policies and practices forward? Can/should gender-related HR policies for regional organizations be developed outside an Islamic gender order? Though we do not profess to have an answer to this question, we do however see this as a central question to be contemplated by HR scholars and practitioners working on and in the region both in Muslim-majority and non-majority countries. HR managers choosing strategies centered on Islamic notions of complementarity may find themselves struggling to build a business case that holds up in front of their HR peers choosing to implement international gender-equity policies and practices or their peers who lead companies in the many non-Muslim areas of the region (i.e. secular, Christian, dominant, mixed faith). These are important questions for HR practitioners to contemplate as they attempt to develop regionally relevant HR systems. These are also important questions to contemplate as organizations continue to build partnerships with regional and international stakeholders such as governments; HR professional bodies; partner, supplier and client organizations; as well as other regulating bodies.

### *Concluding remarks and recommendations for HR policies in regional organizations*

Because of the current state of the literature on women and HR in the Arab MENA, much of our analysis in this paper considered broad macrolevel factors impacting HR policies and practices relevant to women at work generally. From a regional HR perspective, linking the macrolevel factors to organizational policies is essential to create a more fair and equitable employment context for women. The pivotal role that HR practitioners can play to undertake gender audits, to help mainstream gender equity and to establish gender-equity governance, employment and learning environment structures is key. Specific to our research context (i.e. institutions of higher education), Morley et al. (2006) provides a number of varied and useful guidelines in this regard at the organizational as well as national and international levels in developing national contexts. Although, specific recommendations concerning HR policies are beyond the scope of this paper, we believe that Morley's work, in combination with the model devised in the current paper, provide a useful starting point for localizing HR and related policies and practices within the Arab MENA context.

Furthermore, in accordance with our model, we believe that the localization of gender-related HR policies and practices should necessarily engage two levels of analysis (i.e. macrolevel and organizational level) as well as focus on both within the university and outside academic towers. Perhaps the most pressing issue for true localization broadly concerns development. To localize, HR scholars and practitioners need to consider development issues on many fronts. This suggestion therefore brings us full circle to reflect, once again, on the intertextuality between gender, higher education and development in the Arab MENA. This suggestion also leads us to reflect on the role that academics as well as university HR personnel can play to facilitate gender-equity development within the university system itself as well as on the national/regional front.

Here, we first consider issues relevant for university HR departments. Focusing internally, HR-related efforts can be aimed at elevating the gender agenda within their own institutions. To do this, university HR practitioners can work to improve access to education, employment and managerial level positions for women. There is a need for a number of specific gender-related policies within universities such as recruitment, development and retention plans that acknowledge and work to accommodate the lived experiences and socioeconomic and cultural expectations placed on women in the region. Decisions concerning such accommodations will involve, no doubt, heated debate concerning the level of integration of tenets of complementarity versus equality (Moghadam 2005; Metcalfe 2008). For example, in adopting a 'complementarity position', how will HR practitioners develop segregation practices that do not disadvantage women? On the other hand, in choosing to adopt a 'pure equality' position in Islamic nations, how will HR policies respect the different but equal rationale? These are examples of debates and questions that need future attention and serious reflection to develop effective indigenous HR systems.

In terms of national/regional progress, HR practitioners need to adopt an outward focus. On the basis of this, therefore, the university HR departments can work to formulate national gender-equity policies and implementation standards that are localized within the regional/national macrolevel factors documented within our model (see Figure 1). Such an outward focus can assist to develop national action plans, steering mechanisms, accountability measures and evaluation systems for gender-related state policies. Furthermore, universities can engage in capacity-building of women across the region as well as shared-practice models on how women can be supported and promoted in workplaces generally. Ultimately, such an outward focus could elevate universities as agents of social change in their positive developmentally oriented efforts to promote gender equity in the Arab world. Ultimately, such efforts on the part of regional universities may serve to provide regional organizations with gender-related policy and practice examples, and therefore potentially serve as centers of best practice related to gender equity for the region.

Our aim in the current study was to provide insight about the current status of academic women across the Arab MENA region. To do so, we adopted a two-part process involving a critical review of the literature and a compilation of publicly available data from university websites. This examination takes into account the complexity within academic institutions as well as within and across nations to provide a generalized view of various macro- and organizational-level factors impacting the current status of women at work. To better capture these relevant factors, we developed and refined a multilevel hypothetical model and related discussion which may assist researchers to better contextualize the experiences of women working in the Arab MENA. We hope that this work provides a preliminary foundation for theory-building, future research and policy development for

HR practitioners concerned with developing HR systems more equitable for women at work in this context.

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[NB: references with single asterisk\* were used in the critical content analysis. References with double asterisk \*\* are Reports].

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